

## PAID ADVERTISEMENT

## In Barbers Hill, student educational needs come first

### District rejects Chronicle's cry for politically oriented 'lesser' goals

I tried to get a letter to the editor printed in the Houston Chronicle in the midst of the COVID-19 disaster in late 2020 to criticize their detrimental pandemic guidance, and was repeatedly denied and asked to alter my words. Now, the Chronicle editorial board has criticized Barbers Hill ISD's dress code and our Education Foundation has taken the unprecedented step of buying advertising to ensure an unaltered response.

How poignantly ironic that the Chronicle criticizes limited dress code conformity that is correlated to student success yet wholeheartedly sanctioned complete face-mask wearing conformity that is still questioned today as an adequate defense against COVID-19. These clear-cut errors in judgment are explained by the Chronicle's need to do more fact-checking and less fact-blocking.

An Indian proverb states: "We are kept from our goal not by obstacles but by a clear path to a lesser goal."

During the COVID-19 health crisis disaster, the Barbers Hill ISD board of trustees and leadership never took our eye off the ball and kept the focus where it should've been -- listening to our taxpayers and parents, and putting children's educational needs first. We had traditional school during the entire pandemic and our students, unlike most of the rest of the state, did not suffer educational setbacks.

This was accomplished in spite of contradictory and politicized guidance from the Chronicle and Harris County leadership that data has now shown was detrimental to children. The data was clear from the beginning that COVID-19 did not affect children with the severity that it did adults, and the data is equally clear now that students suffered irreparable harm by not being in a traditional classroom setting.

Now that same Chronicle editorial board has criticized our district's dress code in an editorial and, once again, they would have us lose sight of the main goal of educational excellence by pursuing politically oriented "lesser" goals. The editorial was consistent with every single media representation of this topic nationwide. It had misinformation -- some of which the Chronicle has corrected -- and it omits significant information that would cause the reader to perhaps reach a different conclusion than the Chronicle's editorial board.

These are just some of the pertinent omitted facts.

- We have African-American students with hair longer than our dress code permits. They applied, qualified for, and were granted religious exemptions.

- We are one of the highest achieving school districts in the state and received A's at each campus, and an A for our district in the most recent state accountability system, which produced so many low grades that other districts collectively sued to prevent the state from publicly disclosing their grades. Barbers Hill's success has caused our district to be one of the fastest-growing district's percentage-wise in the entire Houston area. In fact, our African-American student population has grown 62% since 2021. Parents are flocking to a disciplined school district that prioritizes safety and has high expectations in ALL things and doesn't lose sight of the main goal of educational excellence.



Greg Poole

enforcing it and pursue easier, lesser goals.

The problem with relaxing standards without any regard to academic implication is the precedent it creates. Our military academies at West Point, Annapolis and Colorado Springs maintain a rigorous expectation of dress. They realize being an American requires conformity with the positive benefit of unity, and being a part of something bigger than yourself.

- Despite our relatively small percentage of African-American students, Barbers Hill ISD has a progressive history. We had African-American representation on our school board in the 1970s when many districts were grappling with integration, and we have African-American representation on our school board now - Lt. Mark Wilson, an Air Force officer in the Texas National Guard. Mr. Wilson is a product of Barbers Hill schools and was elected class president. He also chaired a community dress code committee in 2021 that reinforced our community's complete support for the current dress code.

- We are not in violation of the CROWN Act, and the state representative who authored the bill has clearly stated that it was to protect the ability to wear braids, locs and twists which we have always allowed. She also stated in a TV interview that hair length is not protected by the Act. We have taken the highly unusual step of seeking a declaratory judgment in state district court to verify our interpretation.

Does that sound like a rogue school district that is making up rules? I certainly hope the Chronicle is willing to give equal coverage to the court's decision.

Ultimately, this is an issue of local control and deciding who should be setting the policies, goals and expectations of our school district.

We have had two school board elections in which candidates supporting our current dress code earned 88 percent and 91 percent of the total votes. The people who pay taxes in the Barbers Hill ISD are the voices we listen to.

Our school board's determination to be true representatives of the people and never lose sight of the goal of providing the absolute best public education a student can receive is what created a COVID-19 response that the passing of time has shown was the right approach for students. Maintaining high standards in all things is also what's best for students.

Regarding the specific dress code infraction specified in last month's editorial, obviously I am constrained by student privacy rights to comment directly about an individual student, but it is a matter of public record that the child moved this year from a neighboring school district that allows long hair on males, and I can point out that all students and their parents receive and sign off on the dress code at the beginning of each year.

The attorney currently challenging the Barbers Hill ISD dress code has clearly stated to our lawyer that her goal is to "bankrupt" the school district and its individual leaders.

The litigation is not about what is best for students.

Barbers Hill ISD will continue to make decisions to protect and fight for the rights of its community to set the standards and expectations for our school district even if